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The Romantic and Tragic Ballads: Popular Dreams for an Egalitarian Society?

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THE ROMANTIC AND TRAGIC BALLADS: POPULAR DREAMS FOR AN EGALITARIAN SOCIETY?

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ABSTRACT

Romantic and tragic ballads form a body of protest literature against the conservative and elitist attitudes of Middle English courtly literature. Most courtly literature, written by and for members of the aristocracy, looks back to an ideal past, stressing individual achievement over common good in the affairs of love and battle. Courtly literature, overlooking, ignoring, or avoiding problems of contemporary life, tends to uphold the status quo. In contrast, the popular ballads are implicitly anti-courtly, and they tend, however subtly, to work toward the destruction of the status quo by undermining the system of values expressed in courtly literature. The popular ballads confront the problems of life, particularly the problems of love, squarely. Coming directly from the experiences and aspirations of the people, these ballads attempt to deal with contemporary problems as the people saw them; therefore, they are, indeed, progressive expressions of the late Middle Ages. Many of the expressions of discontent may be unconscious; nevertheless, they are evident in the exposition of problems that arise out of the philosophy of courtly love, or a corrupted version of it, and problems that arise out of social prejudice and discrimination. The ballads suggest a common solution for most of these problems: implicitly they propose tearing down the barriers that divide men into artificially and arbitrarily-established social classes so that all men may have the opportunity to achieve their highest possible potential in private and in public life. This solution is, essentially, the ultimate popular dream for an egalitarian society; it is a longing for a time in which all men will be valued for their human worth, and secondary factors such as wealth and position will be given secondary importance. The romantic and tragic ballads, pointing to a time in which men of all classes will freely live and work together, provide a realistic glimpse into the popular aspirations of a little-documented historical era.

THE ROMANTIC AND TRAGIC BALLADS:

POPULAR DREAMS FOR AN EGALITARIAN SOCIETY?

In England during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries a body of courtly literature grew up, largely derived from the French romance tradition. This Middle English literature, much of which was written for aristocratic audiences, seems to propose as models for the present the standards, idealism and gallantry of a remote and heroic past.[1] Even much of the literature which circulated widely and which may have been written for non-aristocratic audiences reflects the values of the court. At the same time in England another genre of literature was in its formative stages, a literature which may reflect the reactions of the lower classes against the standards of a courtly etiquette which had little relevance to their daily lives. Out of the mass of the British common people came the British popular ballads—popular, because they come from the people and mirror their culture, their mores, their attitudes and their aspirations more closely than do the romances.

In many respects the romantic and tragic ballads form a protest literature against the conservative and elitist attitudes of courtly literature and of the aristocratic audience which fostered it. The romantic ballads suggest that if all men were evaluated on the basis of merit and virtue without regard to social status and economic worth, many of the problems of contemporary life would be minimized; and although three-quarters of the tragic ballads seem to sustain the values found in courtly literature, what they really

do is to show that because the tragic characters fail to live up to the standards of courtly romance, they bring destruction upon themselves.

Courtly literature, written, for the most part, by and for members of the court, naturally reflects the standards, expectations and aspirations of its aristocratic writers and audience. The prevailing philosophy in courtly literature is the concept of courtly love. This concept, originally limited to members of the nobility, implies that in the affairs of the heart, true lovers may go to whatever lengths necessary to fulfill their love. Since courtly love encouraged extramarital sexual affairs, its morality sharply clashed with the more conventional moral codes sanctioned by the medieval Christian Church. Moreover, courtly literature, having an aristocratic bias, tends to favor the status quo. If it includes any members of the lower classes, it often does so in a condescending or pejorative manner; common people rarely have any place in courtly literature except as menial servants, as objects of charity, or as guides.[2] Courtly literature seems to have been written for an audience which looked back with nostalgia upon some glorious days which probably never really existed except in legend and literature. By glorifying the ideals of an heroic past or by concentrating on romantic love, Middle English courtly literature reflects the attitudes and values of an aristocratic audience that does not seem to be concerned with the problems of contemporary life.

Courtly romances that draw their subject-matter from exotic and by-gone days seem to disregard present-day issues and realities. For example, the typical romance hero does not occupy himself with the world as it is. His goal is to achieve self-realization through the

attainment of a moral victory. He follows the chivalric traditions of truth, honor, wisdom, humility, and service to women, but there is little evidence that he applies these virtues practicably in worldly affairs. Romances such as "Sir Tristram" and "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight" are representative of the idealized Middle English romance.

Other courtly romances describe a nobleman's winning the love of his lady. These romances follow the tradition established in Roman de la Rose, by the French poets Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, more than the tradition of the Arthurian romances, for the concern of the knight is solely to possess the love of his lady. Chaucer's "The Knight's Tale" and "The Franklin's Tale" are more or less representative of this type of courtly romance.

As the idea of courtly love strayed from its original conception, a few poets began to experiment with the pastourelle, a short poetic form that originated in France. The typical English pastourelle describes a romantic adventure of a man of the court: his meeting a maiden (usually a shepherdess) on a Spring morning, his attempts to seduce her, and his ultimate success or failure. The pastourelle supports the concept of courtly love, although a corrupted version of it. Usually the lover has no intention of marrying the girl; his involvement with her is a matter of temporary passion.

In contrast, the British popular ballads are implicitly anti-courtly, and they tend, however subtly, to work toward the destruction of the status quo by undermining the system of values expressed in the romances and by the system which supports them. The romantic and tragic ballads present a cross-section of the classes: in

approximately two-thirds of these ballads members of the aristocracy interact with tradesmen, craftsmen and laborers in the universal dilemma of the business of life. In the romantic ballads the resolutions are not determined by social standing; rather, men and women are judged implicitly by their human worth. In the tragic ballads, the problems get out of control and end in death.

Problems of contemporary life are very evident in the early ballads. Most of the ballad stories concern romantic attachments which are complicated by social prejudice, the customs of inheritance, the stigma of unwed motherhood, and infidelity. One of the primary problems of the late Middle Ages seems to have resulted from a social system which divided men into classes on the basis of wealth and position and provided no way for a person born into the middle or lower class to improve his social standing. The romantic ballads allude to a popular desire that distinctions be leveled within the broad social spectrum. These ballads champion the cause of equality for all people by portraying a society in which men and women rapidly rise from lower levels to upper through fortunate marriages.

The romantic ballads encourage and embrace the idea of people of common birth breaking through barriers that prevent their attaining comfortable positions in life. They advocate a democratic appraisal of man based on his universal human value, as opposed to his worth in physical objects. Although many of these ballads are highly imaginary, they nevertheless express the ultimate dreams of the people. In a sense, the ballads may be seen as progressive and idealistic expressions of the late Middle Ages, for they both voice discontent with a system and offer suggestions for reasonable solutions.

Implicitly directing their attention toward the social system, the ballads intimate that the very system which courtly literature supports needs restructuring.

The system needs restructuring primarily on two levels. The ballads indirectly expose problems that arise out of the philosophy of courtly love, or a degenerated form of it, and problems that arise out of social prejudice and discrimination, especially out of parental opposition to a son's or daughter's choice of lover. The first part of this study considers some romantic ballads and their implications for these problems; the second part deals with tragic ballads, which fail to resolve these problems successfully.

I have arranged selected romantic ballads in an order that shows a progression from the pastourelle tradition in love to a more liberated tradition. First in this sequence appear ballads that resemble the pastourelle; then, ballads which modify the pastourelle pattern; finally, ballads in which an heir (or heiress) wholeheartedly seeks to marry a person of low birth and will use any trick or disguise that will enable him (or her) to do so.

At least half a dozen ballads are derivative of the pastourelle either directly or indirectly. "Crow and Pie" (111)[3] and "The Baffled Knight" (112) resemble typical pastourelles more than ballads. In fact, "Crow and Pie" is identical to its pastourelle counterpart: a knight proposes love to a girl of low birth and offers her gifts; when she refuses him, he overpowers her, rapes her, and then leaves her. The lover of the pastourelle does not always succeed, though; sometimes the girl is clever enough to resist or to baffle him,[4] as is illustrated in "The Baffled Knight": a knight, meeting a maiden in the countryside, demands that she yield to him. The girl suggests

that he take her to her father's hall, where they can enjoy themselves in comfort. When they arrive there, the girl enters by a wicket gate and locks it after her. She flings back a taunt that he has lost his chance to have her. Her spirited mockery is not at all flattering to the knight or to the aristocratic class which he represents.

"The Knight and the Shepherd's Daughter" (110) opens with a similar proposal of love by a nobleman and the subsequent seduction of the girl, but the remainder of the ballad inverts the conventional pastourelle ending and resembles somewhat the action of "The Wife of Bath's Tale." The knight rides off, leaving the shepherdess behind, but she follows him to court and lodges a complaint against him to the king. The king orders the knight, Earl Richard, to marry the girl or be hanged. Like the knight in WBT, the Earl would pay almost any amount to keep from marrying this "beggar's brat" (C.19[1]). He tries to bribe the girl with five hundred pounds in gold, but she refuses his money, remarking that if he had not wanted a shepherd's daughter as wife he might have left her alone. "With hevinesse and much sorwe,"[5] Earl Richard takes the shepherdess as his wife, but he is so ashamed of her that he spends his wedding night in tears. The next morning he overhears a conversation and learns to his joyful surprise that he has married a lady of high renown, but unlike the knight in WBT who, after he had experienced a change in attitude toward his "lothly" and old wife, saw her transformed into a beautiful lady, Earl Richard has not altered his thinking toward the lower classes. The ballad is critical of the Earl's conduct, suggesting a failure of some of the nobility to respect the rights of commoners,

but it backs out of this criticism in the conclusion which handsomely rewards the Earl's ignoble behavior.

This ballad must have been very popular, for it exists in twelve versions. In all but one the shepherdess is the daughter of an earl or a king; the knight, a nobleman. A detail in K provides a satirical comment on the knight's behavior: in this variant the shepherdess is actually a princess, but the knight, for all his lordly ways, is no more than a blacksmith's son. A significant implicit statement of the ballad is its portrayal of the ideal ruler as a man favorable to the common people, who listens to their complaints, and who redresses their wrongs. The sorry attitude of the knight, who represents the traditional nobility, the sense of justice and fair play of the girl, who represents the common man's ideal of the new nobility, and the impartiality of the king are reminiscent of similar implications in the Robin Hood ballads.

Several other romantic ballads which are related to the pastourelle imply a criticism of conduct unworthy of a man of the nobility. In each of these ballads a nobleman seduces a girl of humble birth and apparently deserts her, but he returns and marries her, perhaps because he really loves her, or perhaps out of honor, since he had wronged her.

May, the shepherdess of "The Broom of Cowdenknows" (217), is beautiful, sensible, and wary of the handsome cavalier who pretends to have lost his way. Desiring his pleasure with this fair girl, he forces her against her will and leaves her to face the shame of the unwed mother. In the N variant May's father laments that his daughter had not died at birth, such dishonor she has brought upon the family. In the same variant, the Laird of Ochilberry states firmly that he will

not "harbour an arrant hure" (20^4) on his estate; but privately he praises the girl for not revealing the identity of her child's father: "'Ye did weel, my bonnie may, / To keep the secret twixt me and thee'" ($27^{2,3}$). Moved by her loyalty and circumspection, the Laird marries May. Although he is unwilling to acknowledge the child as his own, the Laird expresses no shame at making a tenant's daughter the Lady of Ochilberry. The other variants conclude in a similar manner.

The M variant includes a detail critical of the marriage custom that requires a substantial dowry for a daughter. In this variant, the girl is the daughter of the former Laird of Cowdenknows, who has lost his fortune by gambling and now must live with his family in poverty. As May performs the duties of a milkmaid, she laments that she must remain a maid, for she has no dowry. A girl of noble birth without money had about as good a chance to marry a man of rank or position as a girl of low birth—little chance at all. In the other variants, May, as the daughter of a tenant farmer, would have had no dowry, either.

Like May, the girl of "The Rantin Laddie" (240) must patiently endure the social ostracism of the unwed mother, but her story differs from May's in that the rantin laddie (the Earl of Aboyne) who had seduced this pretty town-girl had also offered to marry her at Martinmass, and she had refused him. As a result, she daily faces the scorn of family, friends and servants. She spends most of her time in the kitchen, where she sings as she tends her baby,

> 'My father he will not me own,
> And my mother she neglects me,
> And a' my friends hae lightlyed me,
> And their servants they do slight me.'
>
> (A. 2)

At last, she writes to the Earl and tells him of her plight. The Earl had apparently given her up, for there is no evidence that he would have returned to her had she not written to him; yet, when he read of her distress, "The tears they cam down rappin" (B.7[4]), and he immediately vowed to rescue her, to the extent of calling out five hundred of his men, with their horses and claymores, to ride into the town to get her (C. 21, 22). Proudly the Earl returns to his Buchanshire home with his "lowland lassie," calling out in every town along the way, "'Fall back, each saucy dame, / Let the Countess of Aboyne before ye'" (C.27[3,4]). The Earl manifests none of the aristocratic pride of blood such as Walter, Marquis of Saluces, seems to in "The Clerk's Tale"; instead, he is exuberant. Of course, Walter also was jubilant on his bridal day, and it should be noted that he married Griselda at the beginning of their relationship. In the ballad, the Earl had wronged the girl; he was setting things right by making her his wife. A significant difference between the narrative poem and the ballad is that the Earl did not require absolute sovereignty as a condition for marriage; it was enough for him to know that the girl loved him as he loved her.

"The Wylie Wife of Hie Town Hie" (290) exists in four variants, and in each, the inn-keeper's wife entices the lovely lassie of "hie town hie" into the inn because one of her patrons desires the girl. In the B, C and D variants a soldier seduces the girl, and his apparent desertion of her is explained by an implicit criticism of contemporary inheritance laws which worked against the poor younger sons of noble families. When the girl asks his name, he tells her that he is the second son of a nobleman and must make his fortune through military service, since his elder brother inherited all the family estate.

He then leaves the girl, with no promise to return, supposedly because he cannot support a family on his salary. In B and D, the soldier, when he receives a promotion to rank of captain, returns at once to marry the girl. In C, the soldier returns and makes her Duchess of Douglas Dale; either he had been heir to the Douglas lands all along and had gone into service for adventure, as had the heirs in "The Bonny Hind" (50) and "The King's Dochter Lady Jean" (52), or he had become heir through the death of his brother, as happens in "The Duke of Gordon's Daughter" (237).

In the A variant the lover, who is heir to the Earl of Beaton, makes no promise to return. Two years later, as he happens to walk in the "hie town," he sees the girl with a beautiful child. Identifying himself as the father, he makes the girl the Lady of Beaton Castle. The A variant of "Wylie Wife" resembles "Cowdenknows," for the perspective of each toward the noblemen involved is unfavorable: a man can do with a girl as he pleases and then desert her (this is an attitude often encountered in the pastourelle, as mentioned previously); if he returns to her, his willingness to make her his bride is evidently reparation enough for the months of disgrace she had experienced. The fact that the nobleman returns is the important point, for each of the men seems to regard the girl as worthy of merit and worthy of his love.

Ballads that were influenced by the pastourelle criticize implicitly the immorality of unlawful love, implying that a man who ravishes a girl should marry her. The rantin laddie willingly married his sweetheart, for he had proposed marriage to her long before; in both "Cowdenknows" and "Wylie Wife" the lover voluntarily returns to marry the girl. To be sure, the philanderer of "The Knight

and the Shepherd's Daughter" had to be forced to marry the girl he had wronged; the ballad unmistakably shows that he was as willing to seduce a girl of humble birth as he was later unwilling to wed her, suggesting that this arrogant nobleman needed to undergo an experience which would humble him. These ballads also dispel the notion that romantic love is limited to the nobility, a theme that will be expanded below.

The next group of ballads suggests a popular desire that the class distinctions fostered by the conservative aristocrats be eliminated. These ballads suggest that one way to do this would be to permit marriages of lovers of unequal social rank. In a number of these ballads the heir or heiress receives family opposition, but in most instances the family at last is won over to the side of romantic love. In other ballads, the heir courts in disguise so that the girl he wins will love him for himself and not for his wealth. Most of these ballads express the individual's desires and rights in terms of bonuses, disguises, or tricks. The ballads stress that these unequal matches become happy marriages because the lover of noble birth marries, not "for gold or goods," but "for nothing but love."

At the opening of "Tom Potts" (109) Rosamund, the only daughter to Lord Arundel, is being courted by Lord Phenix. Rosamund refuses his suit, even though he has promised her his estate as dower[6]; she has a love of her own, she says, "'A serving-man of low degree. / One Tommy Pots is his name'" (B.6[2,3]). Lord Phenix finds it hard to believe that a lady of the nobility would consider marrying a social inferior. He seeks the aid of Lord Arundel, who forces his wishes upon his daughter by reminding her that she is his heir: "'Thou'st be bride to Lord Phenix, / Daughter, give thou'le be heir to me'"

(A.$10^{3,4}$). Rosamund has little choice. She agrees to marry Phenix, but only out of filial obedience.

Rosamund need not have fretted about marrying Phenix, for the balladeer, in his enthusiasm to show a rich girl marrying a poor servant, places everything in Tom's favor. While Rosamund and her maids meet in prayer, Tom approaches his master, Lord Jockey, for help. He comes directly to the point: "'I have a love in Scotland fair, / And I fear that I shall lose her with poverty'" he says (B.$36^{3,4}$). That a servant would go before his master with such a plea speaks well for the humanity of Lord Jockey, whose attitude toward the serving class differs appreciably from that of most of the aristocracy. Lord Jockey immediately increases Tom's weekly wages from three pounds to forty, and he offers Tom substantial loans of gold, silver and land-holdings, to the half of his estate. These generous loans give Tom the confidence he needs to challenge Lord Phenix in a joust for Rosamund.

On the day appointed, the two men meet at Guilford Green, where Phenix, an experienced horseman, easily unseats Tom, wounding him. But Tom, skilled in medical charms, cures his wound, remounts, and defeats Phenix, who promises to relinquish his claim to Rosamund if Tom will heal his injured arm. Tom does so; then Phenix reneges and proposes two additional trials before he is willing to admit defeat. At last, moved by the girl's fidelity to a servant, he surrenders completely. Still concerned that Tom will not adequately provide for Rosamund, Phenix offers the girl "both lands and livings," which seems to indicate that he felt real affection for her. Lord Arundel, who up to this point had supported the traditional aristocratic attitude toward class and rank, gives in. "'Seeing the matter will be no better,'" he declares, "'Of all my lands Tom Pots shall be the heir'"

(B.102[3,4]). Romantic love triumphs over the social system, and Tom Potts, formerly a humble serving-man, becomes the young Lord of Arundel. The ballad closes with a stated moral, an uncommon feature in ballad literature: "'Neither marry for gold nor goods, / Nor marry for nothing but love'" (B. 104[3,4])

In "The Kitchie-Boy" (252) Earl Richard's daughter and heir is unwilling to let class distinction prevent her marrying the man she loves, Willie, the kitchen-boy. Independently wealthy, she shows both enterprise and initiative by working within the social system to obtain her desire: since her father is impressed with wealth, then she will give Willie the trappings of social distinction so that he will appear to be wealthy. She has a lavish ship built for Willie, who sails the seas for a time and then returns to Scotland in the guise of a rich lord. Earl Richard, not suspecting deception, orders his daughter to "busk" herself while he runs down to the shore to invite the rich young man to dine. "'I wad gie a' my rents / To hae ye married to him,"' he says excitedly (A.27[5,6]). Willie, who has painted his face and blackened his hair so that the Earl will not recognize him, is not even recognized by his sweetheart until he presents her the golden ring which she had given him before the voyage. The Earl heartily sanctions the marriage, little thinking that the groom is his own kitchen-boy. The girl eventually tells her father of the trick, but not until after the birth of the first child, a son. By that time the Earl had been won over by Willie's personal merit and integrity. He laughs merrily,

> 'My daughter, youre nae to blame;
> For you've married for love, and no for land,
> So a' my gowd is yours to claim.'
> (C.37[2-4])

The Earl now seems to regard Willie as a person worthy in his own right rather than in terms of his economic worth and social status, the attitude which the balladeer has had of Willie all along. The sympathy of the ballad is always with the lovers, even though the balladeer remarks in the opening stanza of each variant that it was to the lady's dishonor that she loved a social inferior. The balladeer approves of the deception which the lovers resort to in order that they may marry, and he indirectly ridicules the Earl for falling gullibly for the trick. This romance between an aristocratic girl and a servant proves successful because the girl had the initiative and the means to execute a clever plan that would guarantee her father's approval of Willie. The trick worked beautifully, and by the time the father learned the truth it was too late to mend matters, so he accepted the former servant as a social equal.

In "Richie Story" (232) there is no evidence of family opposition to Annie's wish to marry beneath her class; it is Annie's lover, the footman, who opposes the match. Reminding Annie that he has no source of income to support an earl's daughter in the manner to which she is accustomed, he encourages her to marry the Earl of Hume, a wealthy suitor. Annie is steadfast in her love for Richie, and she humbly tells him that she will forego the advantages of the nobility in order to marry him.

In most variants Annie is the eldest daughter of the Earl and is heir to his estate; there is no implication that she would have forfeited her inheritance by marrying beneath her class. In F, Annie, as the youngest daughter, might not have received a substantial dowry even if she had not married into the lower class,[7] so that by choosing Richie, she was unquestionably forsaking her

life as an aristocrat for the life of the lower class. In F, the sister who married the Earl of Hume and who had become heir to the family estate seems to have reassessed the inheritance customs which tended to work against Annie's well-being, for she offers Annie half of her inheritance. Like Annie, the sister seems to have come to an understanding of humanity on a new level, for she accepts Richie democratically, as Annie had accepted him long before.

The attitude of Lady Hume does not reflect the attitudes of the general aristocracy or of the lower classes toward this marriage. In each village through which Annie and Richie travel the nobility greet Annie with ceremony, but they ignore Richie. When the young couple arrives at his mother's house, Annie meets a new variety of social condemnation in his mother's rude remark, "'Cast off your silks and kilt up your coats, / And muck the byre wi Richie Story'" (C.$9^{3,4}$). The mother must have been a little taken back by Annie's ready, almost eager, and somewhat defiant response:

> 'Hold your tongue, my scolding minnie,
> For I'll cast off my silks and kilt my coats,
> And muck the byres with Richie Story.'
> (C.10^{2-4})

The ballad suggests that equivalence of rank and wealth are not necessary factors in a successful marriage, for Annie found marital happiness by following the dictates of her heart and marrying a man of humble birth. Like Rosamund, Annie has not married for gold or goods, but for love. Perhaps more important, the element of good, strong practicality in the ballad suggests that resilence and the ability to adapt are essential factors for happiness in a new life-style.

In "Lizie Lindsay" (226), "Glasgow Peggie" (228) and "Dugall Quin" (294) a nobleman courts a girl of low birth and makes her his bride, but because he courts in the disguise of a poor man, the girl never guesses that the man she marries is really a wealthy Highland heir. The parents of Donald MacDonald, young lord of one of Scotland's most ancient clans, require their son to court Lizie Lindsay in poverty:

> 'Ye mae gae to Edinbruch city,
> And fesh hame a lady wi thee,
> But see that ye bring her but flattrie,
> And court her in grit povertie.'
> (B. 2)

Donald wins Lizie's love. Now Lizie is confronted with a problem of values: should she go with Donald, whom she loves, and live in conditions alien to her fairly comfortable social position as a towngirl, or should she renounce him? Her parents threaten Donald with hanging, little knowing who he is, but he only laughs broadly. Lizie decides to marry Donald despite his poverty. Together the two travel by foot over "rocky and knabby" roads and mountains "baith strait and stay." They spend their wedding night in a lowly "shielen," making their meal on curds and green whey and sleeping on a bracken bed. In the morning Donald takes Lizie to a hilltop and shows her a lovely meadow and a "bonnie braw" castle which, he tells her, are his. "'Sae rue na ye've come to the Hielands,'" he says gently,

> 'Sae rue na ye've come aff wi me,
> For ye're great Macdonald's braw lady,
> And will be to the day that ye dee.'
> (B. 28)

Lizie chose to marry Donald because she loved him, little realizing that in so doing she would rise from the rank of middle-class to become Lady MacDonald of Kincawsie.

"Dugall Quin" seems to be another version of "Lizie Lindsay," "Glasgow Peggie" has the exciting atmosphere of rugged highlander troopers riding boldly into town to steal cattle or feed or, as in this ballad and in "Bonny Baby Livingston" (222), "Eppie Morrie" (223) and "Rob Roy" (225), to steal a bonnie lassie. In the D variant of "Glasgow Peggie," Donald actually sends his ten men into Peggie's house to carry her out bodily when her parents refuse his request for Peggie's hand in marriage. By marrying Donald, Peggie improves her social position considerably. The ballad closes with this expression of approval:

> Now a' that Peggy had before
> Was a wee cot-house and a little kail-yairdie,
> But now she is lady o the whole Isle of Skye,
> And now bonny Peggy is ca'd my lady.
> (E. 10)

Just as the heiresses of "Tom Potts" and "The Kitchie-Boy" needed the assistance of a generous master or a trick so that each might marry the man of her choice, these highland heirs seem to feel the need for subterfuge in their romantic quests. Like the marriage in "The Wife of Bath's Tale," these marriages prove to have a hidden asset, for none of the girls dreams that she has married a prominent and wealthy lord, and she does not learn this until after she spends at least a night with her husband in his supposed humble home.

The ballads seem to hold forth such people as fair Rosamund and Donald MacDonald as representative of an ideal nobility, and they seem to look forward to a time when artificial social barriers no longer will thwart a person's aspirations in marriage or in work. "John of Hazelgreen" (293) and "The Beggar Laddie" (280) take the ultimate dream of social freedom even further, for these ballads have

no hint of problems in love that result from the courtly love philosophy or from inheritance laws or social prejudice.

"John of Hazelgreen" is the only ballad which alludes to a widely-accepted medieval marriage custom that the father find a suitable bride for his son.[8] This is exactly what John's father undertakes to do, and he has his son's best interests so at heart that the girl he finds for his son is the very girl whom young John had dreamed he would marry. The father may have searched for a bride from among the nobility, but in the ballad he is searching in country lanes when he overhears a young girl singing about John of Hazelgreen. He stops to talk with her. She tells him that she has dreamed that she would marry John of Hazelgreen, but she weeps that she cannot, since she is very poor. The father is charmed with her, and without revealing his identity, he tells her that he will make her the bride of his eldest son. The girl continues to weep, for she would rather die for Hazelgreen than to marry another man; nevertheless, she goes with the old gentleman to his home. There they are met by John himself, and he is overjoyed with the bride. He dries her tears with his greeting:

> 'Cheer up your heart, my dearest dear,
> Ye're flower out oer them a'.
> This night shall be our wedding-een,
> The morn we'll say, Amen;
> Ye'se never mair hae cause to mourn,
> Yere lady o Hazelgreen.'
>
> (D. 17)

Neither young John nor his father seems to be concerned with the social status of the lassie, for they both treat her as if she were a fair princess. The ballad has some qualities of a fairy- tale, and it seems to express a wistful desire that class distinctions be eliminated so that the course of true love can run smoothly. In this

ballad it is the father who assists the course of true love, and he, too, must make use of a trick. In ballads in which a member of the aristocracy marries a commoner, a ruse of some sort seems to be necessary to compensate for differences in social status, so that the emphasis will not be on the radical departure from traditional marriages of the upper class but on the happy result of the ruse, itself.

The ruse employed in "The Beggar Laddie" (280) does not serve the same function. Here is another ballad in which lack of social prejudice in the choosing of a marriage partner is the cause of a happy and, surprisingly, a desirable match. The first part of "The Beggar Laddie" resembles "Richie Story," in that a girl of noble birth falls in love with a man of low birth, but the two ballads differ noticeably. In "The Beggar Laddie," parental consent for the girl to marry is irrelevant, for the "bonnie lassie" seems to be independent of family and friends, although it is quite unlikely that the parents would have approved the marriage of their daughter to a shepherd. The sacrifice the lassie must make is great; to the best of her knowledge she must henceforth live in extreme poverty, not even with the dubious distinction of being a footman's wife, but only with the reproach of being a beggar's wife. Yet, the girl cannot but choose to follow the Beggar Laddie, for she loves him dearly.

The ballad opens with a stanza reminiscent of the pastourelle:

> Twas in the pleasant month of June
> When woods and valleys a' grow green,
> And valiant ladies walk alane,
> While Phoebus shines soe clearly.
> (F. I)

In this pleasant month of June, as a young girl walks alone, she notices an unusually "bonnie" shepherd who tends his flocks with

more than the wonted demeanor of a man of his class. She falls in love with him at sight and tells him of her love. "'Bonnie lassie, can ye loo me?'" he asks eagerly (B.3[4]). She replies earnestly that she would follow him wherever he goes, even though he requires that she change her silk dress for beggar's clothes. The laddie leaves his sheep behind, and the lovers wander from town to town, begging. For shame the lassie hangs her head as they pass through the villages. At times she laments her decision, or, at least, that she must now live in poverty; then, chiding her indirectly for prizing material goods above human value, the beggar-laddie tells her to return home, but she dries her tears and continues to follow him. After much wandering, they approach an elegant mansion, and the beggar-laddie boldly knicks on the front door. "'My dear, ye'll be found in faut / For rapping there sae loudly,'" the girl remonstrates fearfully (D. 11[3,4]), but while she is speaking, the door opens and a large crowd of lords and ladies welcome both of them into the hall. "Wi laughter a' were like to fa" (D.13[2]), and one of the lords exclaims, "'Brither, I think we should beg it all, / For she is a bonnie lassie'" (C.13[3,4]). The truth is that the laddie is not a beggar at all, but a knight who had assumed the disguise of a begger so that he might obtain a wife who loved him for himself and not for his social position.

The ballad suggests criticism of the rigidity of upper-class marriages, often contracted for social or political expediency rather than for love, with the implication that a marriage not based on romantic love is unsuccessful. The ballad also praises the lassie's complete lack of social prejudice in the choosing of a husband, although it observes that she acted more foolishly than sensibly:

Yestreen she was the beggar's bride,
As his wife she now stood by his side,
And for a' the lassie's ill-misguide,
She's now the young knight's lady.
(D. 15)

Two other romantic ballads, neither of which fits into one of the preceding categories, tell stories of romantic love which could have had near-tragic consequences because of social discrimination on the part of the families of the lovers. If it had not been for a fortuitous change in Ogilvie's fortune, "The Duke of Gordon's Daughter" (237) would have ended as unhappily as many of the tragic ballads. The Duke does not object to Ogilvie's social standing—he is the second son to the Earl of Northumberland—but as second son, Ogilvie has no fortune. He is trying to make his living as a soldier. The Duke forbids Jeany to marry Ogilvie, and he highhandedly requests the king to hand the soldier. The king refuses to do this, but he takes away Ogilvie's commission, reducing him to the rank of foot-soldier. Despite the drastic cut in salary, Ogilvie and Jeany marry. In three years they have three children and are reduced to such poverty that they must seek help from the Duke. Jeany's father welcomes his daughter and her children, but he refuses to admit Ogilvie, who now departs for military service overseas. If the resolution of the ballad complied with the wishes of this intolerant Duke, Jeany and Ogilvie would never have seen each other again. Providentially, Ogilvie soon receives word that through the deaths of his brother and family he has become heir to his father's property and is now the Earl of Northumberland. Ogilvie returns at once to the Gordon household to take his wife and children to their new home. When he arrives, the Duke, who has learned of Ogilvie's change in fortune, welcomes his son-in-law with open arms, offering him gold

and silver and the fellowship of wine. Ogilvie replies that he has come for Jeany; he will have no dealings with a man whose only thought is of material possessions:

> 'I'll have none of your gold and silver,
> Nor none of your white-money,
> But I'll have bonny Jeany Gordon,
> And she shall now go with me.'
> (31)

The ballad ascribes part of the blame for this near-tragedy to current inheritance laws, but most of the blame belongs to the Duke, whose aristocratic intolernace stands in the way of happiness for his daughter and the man she loves, first by attempting to use his influence to have Ogilvie killed, later by relegating Ogilvie to a position of a virtual nonentity.

Social discrimination and snobbery contribute to an unfavorable picture of the aristocracy in "The Laird o Drum" (236). The Laird himself is as candid in his association with the lower classes as Donald MacDonald; the rest of his family, however, are intolerant of their social inferiors. The Laird seems to be an older man, old enough, at least, to have experienced a miserable marriage to a woman of higher rank than he. Now the Laird's first wife has died, and he seeks another. Perhaps he seeks a new wife from among the lower classes because of his unhappy first marriage to an aristocratic woman. Whatever the case, he fell in love with the daughter of one of his own shepherds, and he determined to marry her, and to marry happily. When he proposes to the girl, she declines his offer because she is "owr low" to be his bride. Her father gives his permission, although a little reluctantly: his daughter had never been to school, he said, and she could not make tea or clean silver, or perform any of the other duties of a lady of position; she could only milk cows, "shak"

the barns, make kebbucks, and perform other such lowly domestic tasks. The Laird is delighted; to him these objections are assets. He marries the shepherdess and welcomes her to his ancestral home. His family pointedly snubs her, angrily denouncing the marriage: "'You've done us wrong,'" one of the brothers shouts; "'You've married one below our degree, / A stain to a' our kin'" (A.10[2-4]). The Laird ignores his family's ill manners, but he has been affected by their snobbery. That evening he observes somewhat longingly,

> 'Gin ye had been o high renown,
> As ye are o low degree,
> We might hae baith gane down the streets
> Amang gude companie.'
> (D. 18)

His wife reminds him that she had thought this sort of thing would happen; then she remarks wryly,

> 'Gin ye were dead, and I were dead,
> And baith in grave had lain,
> Ere seven years were at an end,
> They'd not ken your dust frae mine.'
> (D.20)

Her attitude expresses the point of view of the ballad as well. The ballad commends the Laird for his lack of social prejudice in the choosing of a wife, and it denounces his family for their perseverance in class bias. The conclusion suggests the mutability theme frequently found in medieval literature, and which originates from such Bible verses as Genesis 3:19: after all, what is a man, whether of high birth or low, when of dust he comes and to dust he will return?

Many of the romantic ballads show a generation of young aristocrats who are less influenced by social distinction than their parents and who fall in love with persons of low estate. In most of these ballads, the lovers marry without parental or family consent, or they overcome the objections in a variety of ways. These ballads end

happily because the lovers follow the dictates of the heart without regard to class distinction, social prominence or wealth. The problems of the romantic ballads are, of course, problems of love. These ballads suggest that if true love is not thwarted by the social system, most of the problems will be happily resolved.

Most of the tragic ballads involve the same social problems, but because the problems are approached from the conservative and elitist attitudes of courtly literature and of the aristocratic class, they end in death by murder or suicide, and in one instance, in the extinction of an entire branch of a powerful Border family.

Lovers in the ballads frequently follow the rules of courtly love, especially the idea that true love must be fulfilled, even though illicitly. In the romantic ballads, resulting problems are resolved to the satisfaction of the lovers and their families; in tragic ballads, however, catastrophe results. In courtly literature the workings out of courtly love often become idealized expressions of the idea that love is its own excuse for being. Although the potential for discovery exists, it remains only a latent possibility, and the matter rests there. The tragic ballads repudiate the courtly ideal by offering more realistic conclusions. Lovers in these ballads take a real risk of discovery, and when the affair becomes known, the results of love are no longer beautiful. The ballads challenge the feasibility of courtly love in real life, saying, in effect, "This is what really happens."

In "Clerk Saunders" (69) the Clerk and Margaret are deeply in love, and he proposes that they fulfill their love. Margaret fearfully says that if her seven "bauld" and "rude" brothers find Saunders in her bower they will kill him, and she implies that she has taken an oath that she will remain a virgin until she has married.

Saunders devises a trick that will both enable Margaret to keep her oath and will allow the lovers to be together. When he arrives at her bower, she places a cloth over her eyes and carries him in her arms to the bed so that she will be able to say truthfully, if questioned the next morning, that she had not seen Saunders the previous night, and that he had not even walked on the floor. The trick is too simple to be effective against seven brothers; when they discover their sister with Saunders, they kill him. The ballad shows what can happen when the ideal of courtly love collapses into the reality of life, but sympathy is with the girl, who resolves never to marry since her true love has died: "'Ye'll marrie me wi the Queen o Heaven,'" she tells her father, "'For man sall never enjoy me'" (C.19[3,4]). "Willie and Lady Maisry" (70) is similar to "Clerk Saunders." Here it is Maisry's father who wishes to protect the honor of his daughter. He posts guards to keep Willie away from Maisry, but Willie manages to kill them and to meet with her. When the father finds the lovers together, he murders Willie; Maisry dies of a broken heart.

"The Clerk's Twa Sons of Owensford" (72) provides another illustration of what can happen when courtly love is followed in life-like situations. When the young clerks engage in illicit love with a mayor's daughters, the mayor sentences the youths to be hanged. The father of the clerks travels to France to plea for their lives, and the daughters ask for mercy, but nothing avails. Before the ballad has concluded, not only have the young clerks died, but their parents and their sweethearts have died as well.

The tragedy of "The Lass of Roch Royal" (76) also arises out of the philosophy of courtly love. In this ballad Anny and Gregory have engaged in pre-marital sexual relations; as a result, Anny has been

banished by her "kyth and kin." When she requests shelter at the home of her lover, she finds no welcome there either, for Gregory's mother turns her away. Gregory, who had been sleeping when Anny came to the door, attempts to find her. He does find her—drowned. In most of the variants Gregory dies of sorrow.

Three of the tragic ballads tell stories of macabre conclusions to real or presumed extramarital romantic affairs. In "Old Robin of Portingale" (80), Robin's young wife has a lover more to her liking than her elderly spouse. She and the lover plan to meet in her bower, but a page overhears them and informs Robin of the plan. When the lover enters the bedchamber, Robin does not give him a chance to defend himself, but decapitates him on sight. Moments later, the wife stumbles over the head. When she cries out, "'Euer alacke, and woe is me, / Heere lies my true-loue deade!'" ($28^{3,4}$), Robin swiftly turns on her and mutilates her with his sword.

A similar tragedy occurs in "Little Musgrave and Lady Barnard" (81) when the standard of courtly love clashes with the standard of conventional morality. These lovers were fully aware that if Lord Barnard should discover their affair he would not take it lightly; nevertheless, they determine to meet together on a day when Barnard hunts. A page informs Lord Barnard of the Lady's infidelity, and Lord Barnard hastens home, storms the door at a most inappropriate moment for the lovers, and forces Musgrave out of bed, killing him in a fair fight. When Lady Barnard laments Musgrave's death Lord Barnard becomes so angry that, like Old Robin, he turns against her and mutilates her. After his passion has cooled, he regrets that he has killed a brave knight and the "fairest lady / That ever did woman's deed'" ($28^{3,4}$).

In "Child Maurice" (83) the husband, another Lord Barnard, suspects his wife of infidelity with Maurice; accordingly, Barnard seeks out the presumed lover, and when he finds him, he beheads him. Returning to the castle with the head, Barnard throws it into his wife's lap. Lady Barnard is stunned. She tells Barnard that the man he has killed is her only child, and for the first time, she confesses a love affair she had had before her marriage to Barnard. Her story reflects the code of courtly love:

> 'When I was in my father's bour,
> A' in my dignity,
> An Englis Lord a visit came,
> Gat Bob Norice wi me.'
> (C. 22)

She had brought up the boy "in a gay green-wood, / Beneath the heavy rain'" (E. $29^{3,4}$). Lord Barnard, who has no heir, exclaims with emotion, "'If ye had tauld me he was your son, / He should hae ridden and gane wi me'" (E.$31^{3,4}$). Both Lord and Lady Barnard die of grief.

The tragedy is a mistake, an irreparable one, and also a natural one; Barnard's suspicions are understandably aroused by Maurice's secretive message to Lady Barnard. The ballad sympathizes with Barnard in this, but it does not condone his hasty action upon the passion of the moment. In addition to implying the invalidity of courtly romance standards in situations which are representative of real life, this ballad and the preceding one undermine the effectiveness of aristocratic leadership through the portrayal of the poor judgment of the two lords Barnard.

The courtly love ideal is partially responsible for the tragedies of "The Bonny Hind" (50) and "The King's Dochter Lady Jean" (52). In these ballads, a nobleman and a lady meet in a

garden, fall in love, and fulfill their love before they discover that they are brother and sister. Because incest has occurred, the girl kills herself, and "the brother is left with remorse and with the knowledge that he has violated the integrity of his own blood."[9] Incest is the major causative factor in these tragedies which might not have occurred had it not been for the catalytic factor of courtly love.

Lovers who face family opposition in the romantic ballads are able to resolve their problems successfully, but for lovers who face opposition in the tragic ballads there is no solution but death. In these ballads there are no successful romances of lovers of unequal social rank; opposition arises out of discrimination within the aristocratic class itself. The preference that the parents show toward their choice of spouse for the son or daughter is usually a matter of who is the richer, or who has the greater prestige.

In "Fair Janet" (64) the father knows that his daughter loves Willie, a man of the nobility; nevertheless, he arranges for her to marry a French lord for the apparent reason that this marriage would be a more prominent one than the marriage to Willie. Janet cannot disobey her father, but she is hardly eager to marry the French lord, since she is with child by Willie. She and Willie seek to elope, but before they can leave, the baby is born. While Willie secretes the child with his mother, Janet's father sends orders to "busk the bride," for the French lord has arrived for the wedding. In the merry-making that follows the ceremony, Janet, exhausted and ill, falls dead. The father's arbitrary command that Janet marry for prestige brought tragedy into his home on the very day that he had anticipated receiving honor and acclaim.

In "Lord Thomas and Fair Annet" (73) Lord Thomas allows himself to be swayed by his family's desires in his choice of a bride. He loves Annet, but since she has no "tocher" (dowry), the family prefers that he marry the rich "brown bride." Only his sister counsels Thomas to marry for love. His mother tells Thomas in B, D and G that her blessing goes with him if he marries the "brown bride"; he will receive her malison, she says in E, F and H, if he marries Annet.[10] Thomas agrees to marry the "brown bride," but he invites Annet to the wedding. Annet adorns herself so beautifully for the ceremony that when Thomas sees her at the kirk, "he clean forgat the bride" (A.21[3]). The "brown bride," who has not been described in complimentary terms, other than that she is rich,[11] becomes furious with jealousy. Drawing a bodkin out of her headgear, she stabs Annet fatally. Thomas immediately kills the "brown bride"; then crying, "'Now stay for me, dear Annet,'" (A.28[1]), he commits suicide. The tragedy of "Lord Thomas and Fair Annet" is the same as that of "Fair Janet": neither Thomas nor Janet is able to overcome successfully parental opposition to their choice of lovers.

Opposition to the marriage between Lady Margaret and Lord William in "Earl Brand" (7) might more accurately be called clan or Border rivalry. The ballad, best-known in the B variant, "The Douglas Tragedy," describes the virtual annihilation of a branch of a powerful Border clan when it attempts to prevent the marriage of their daughter. No other story in ballad literature so vividly demonstrates the inability of the aristocracy to govern themselves or shows the extent of tragedy that can occur when romantic love is thwarted by hatred and rivalry between powerful families.

The Douglas family has apparently forbidden Margaret to marry Lord William, but she follows the inclination of her heart rather than of her family and elopes. Her mother so intensely opposes the match that she sends her husband and sons in pursuit of the lovers. In the battle that ensues, Margaret is torn in loyalty. As she sees Lord William valiantly fight against her seven brothers and her father, and cut them down one by one, she cries,

> 'O hold your hand, Lord William!...
> For your strokes they are wondrous sair;
> True lovers I can get many a ane,
> But a father I can never get mair.'
> (B. 7)

Yet Margaret's allegiance is now to her betrothed. As she bends over her dying father, William chides her: "O chuse, o chuse, Lady Margaret, / O whether will ye gang or bide?'" "'I'll gang, I'll gang, Lord William,' she said, /'For ye have left me no other guide'" (B.9). But William has been mortally wounded. He and Margaret manage to reach his family home before he dies "lang ere midnight." Margaret dies the next morning of grief and sorrow.

The senselessness of the tragedy is heightened in the E variant. Lord William, having defended himself successfully against Margaret's father and brothers, is free to take Margaret as his bride, but the price of his victory is costly. No other ballad closes with such pathos:

> She has taken a napkin from off her neck,
> That was of the cambrick so fine,
> And aye as she wiped her father's bloody wounds,
> The blood ran red as the wine.
>
> * * * * * *
>
> He set her upon the milk-white steed,
> Himself upon the brown;
> He took a horn out of his pocket,
> And they both went weeping along.
> (E. 5,6)

Do the tragic ballads offer any hope that problems arising out of social difficulties can be overcome? It seems not. Many of the tragic ballads have the same underlying social problems as the romantic ballads. A primary reason for the difference in outcome of the two ballad types lies in a basic difference in point of view. Romantic ballads reflect idealistic solutions to the problems of love: the lovers confront the problems and deal with them in creative but practical ways. Like courtly literature, romantic ballads are imaginative, and they do not represent life as it actually is; they present, instead, idealistic situations in which characters achieve exceptional degrees of human potentialities and show themselves at their best—patient, loyal, understanding, flexible. The romantic ballads are close enough to real life to seem almost possible, but the tragic ballads, governed by the tragic principle that the actions of men will end in disaster, offer an antidote to romantic idealism. Skeptical of too-easy solutions, tragic ballads provide more realistic answers to what happens in problems of love that are complicated by illicit sex or social prejudice, especially in the context of unrelenting family opposition. Unlike the lovers in the romantic ballads, lovers in tragic ballads are prevented from working out their problems; they have no opportunity to make use of clever schemes or tricks, and they receive no assistance from outside sources. The romantic ballads imply that lovers who work from high and worthy motives will resolve their problems successfully. The tragic ballads, which involve characters of no less high or worthy motives, imply that because the lovers live in a world characterized by passion, rage and violence, no solutions are possible but death.

Romantic and tragic ballads form a body of protest literature against the conservative and elitist attitudes of Middle English courtly literature because of the basic differences of these genre. Most courtly literature was written by and for members of the aristocracy, and it tells the kinds of stories that the aristocracy wanted to hear: stories that glorify the attainment of a moral victory in the heroic and legendary past, or stories that glorify courtly love in a more immediate setting. Because courtly literature looks back to an ideal past, stressing individual achievement over common good, it overlooks, ignores, or avoids the problems of contemporary life.

The popular ballads, on the other hand, face the problems of life—particularly the problems of love—squarely. Coming directly from the experiences and aspirations of the people, these ballads attempt to deal with contemporary problems as the people saw them. They are, indeed, progressive and idealistic expressions of the late Middle Ages. Although many of the expressions of discontent may be unconscious, they nevertheless are evident in the exposition of problems that arise out of the philosophy of courtly love, or a corrupted version of it, and problems that arise out of social prejudice and discrimination. The ballads suggest a common solution for most of these problems: implicitly they propose tearing down the barriers that divide men into artificially and arbitrarily-established social classes so that all men may have the opportunity to achieve their highest possible potential in private and in public life. This solution is, essentially, the ultimate popular dream for an egalitarian society; it is a longing for a time in which all men will be valued for their human worth, and secondary factors such as wealth and

position will be given secondary importance. The romantic and tragic ballads, pointing to a time in which men of all classes will freely live and work together, provide a realistic glimpse into the popular aspirations of a little-documented historical era.

Notes

[1]Dieter Mehl, The Middle English Romances of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968), p. 159.

[2]A. C. Gibbs, ed., Middle English Romances (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1966), p. 10.

[3]"Crow and Pie" (111), in English and Scottish Popular Ballads, ed. Francis James Child (1890; rpt. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1965), II, 478-79.

(I have based my study on Child's classic collection. The ballads considered in this paper are identified by his classification; all identification is incorporated into the text.)

[4]See, for instance, the pastourelles "De clerico et puella" and "Hey troly loly lo made whither go you?"

[5]Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Wife of Bath's Tale," in Chaucer's Poetry: An Anthology for the Modern Reader, ed. E. T. Donaldson (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1958), p. 185, l. 223.

[6]This specific mention of a groom's endowment to the bride is, to the best of my knowledge, the only such reference in ballad literature. In thirteenth-century England, the public announcement by the groom of his dower to his bride gave the wife a legal right to hold during her lifetime those lands which her husband had given her, should she out-live him. (See Homans, English Villages of the Thirteenth Century, pp. 170-72.) The dower that Lord Phenix promises Rosamund would probably have been a great incentive for most girls to accept his proposal of marriage.

[7]In the late Middle Ages the eldest son (or daughter, if the family had no son) inherited the entire family holdings. Younger children, both boys and girls, were expected to make their way in life through domestic, clerical or military service, or the trades, or by marrying fortunately. This practice is one of the most frequently-criticized customs in the romantic and tragic ballads. (See Homans, Chapter X.)

[8]George Casper Homans, English Villages of the Thirteenth Century (New York: Russell & Russell, 1960), p. 160.

[9]Harry B. Caldwell, "Ballad Tragedy and the Moral Matrix: Observations on Tragic Causation," New York Folklore Quarterly, 28 (1972), 210.

[10]Lord Thomas's marriage came to tragedy despite his mother's blessing. This ballad differs only slightly from ballads in which the mother does curse the son because he marries against her wishes. In "Willie's Lady" (6) the mother does not curse Willie himself, but she places a curse on his wife so that her child will not be born; Willie finds a way to break the charm, however, so that the ballad ends satisfactorily.

In "Prince Robert" (87) the Prince weds a "gay ladye / But he daur na bring her hame" (A.1.3,4). He leaves his bride, Eleanor, in a nearby town while he goes to his mother to ask her blessing. She poisons him, instead. The Prince sends for Eleanor, but he dies before she can reach him. Eleanor dies of sorrow.

In both "Rare Willie Drowned in Yarrow" (215) and "The Mother's Malison" (216) the mother places a curse on the son for wishing to marry against her will. Each son drowns, and in most of the variants, the sweethearts die, also.

[11]The "brown bride" may be the only fat woman in ballad lore. Thomas implies as much when he observes to his brother,

> 'Her oxen may die i the house, billie,
> And her kye into the byre,
> And I sall hae nothing to meseel,
> But a fat fadge by the fyre.'
> (A. 7)

Thomas's sister describes the "brown bride" in these terms: "'Ye'll hae nocht but a howther o dirt, / To feed about your fire'" (B.13.3,4), she tells Thomas, advising him to marry Annet.

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